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John A. Scocos, Secretary

STATE OF WISCONSIN, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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March 7, 2007

Representative Terry Musser, Chair
Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs
State Capitol 11 West
Madison, WI 53708

RE: 2007 Assembly Bill 75

Dear Chairman Musser and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and the half-million Wisconsin veterans we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Assembly Bill 75, a bill regarding exposure to depleted uranium and military service.

First, I want to thank Representative Tom Nelson for all his research and diligent work on this bill, and Senator Rob Cowles for leading the efforts in the Senate, and all the bill's co-authors for their immediate support of this legislation. Veterans issues have a long history of receiving bipartisan support in Wisconsin, and the diverse cosponsorship of this bill is a clear demonstration that tradition continues.

The issue of depleted uranium, or "D.U." has been mired in controversy since the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Following the war, thousands of veterans began reporting inexplicable ailments and illnesses. In their quest for relief, they were first told that it wasn't possible that anything could be wrong with them or that it was just "stress." As more and more sought relief, the federal government changed course, and our veterans were then told that there would be "no stone left unturned" in seeking answers to why they were ill.

Among the causes believed to be at the root of Gulf War veterans' ailments are overlapping, repeated exposures to low levels of chemical warfare agents, burning oil well fires, experimental drugs and vaccines, and depleted uranium, among others – in short, a veritable toxic soup.

After the 1991 Gulf War, 600,000 pounds of DU were left scattered in fragments and dust across the scarred battlefields of Kuwait and Iraq, the remnants of DU-tipped missiles fired from U.S. planes and tanks at hard targets made of steel or concrete. DU munitions were also used in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, in the current war in Iraq, and at test sites like Vieques Island, Puerto Rico.

There is no doubt that DU has been an unusually valuable tool in America's military arsenal.

At the same time, here at the state level, we don't always hear about the research and health efforts being led and conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Pentagon, Health and Human Services, the Institute of Medicine, the Centers for Disease Control, and while much remains to be done, there has been a lot done.

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Sixteen years following the beginning of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, we still have much to learn in order to treat — and to be able to prevent — the health issues that have left nearly one-third of our 1991 Gulf War veterans with service-connected disabling conditions. We have the knowledge today to prevent at least some of those outcomes among today's servicemembers, and we support this bill to help do that.

Thank you again for holding this hearing today, and for your continued advocacy on behalf of all those who have served our nation in its times of need.

Sincerely,
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Scocos", written over a horizontal dotted line.

JOHN A. SCOCOS
Secretary